

To: Planning and Sustainability Commission (PSC)

From: Darnell Jackie Strong and Luther Strong (Property owners in the N/NE Portland corridor/center)

Address of properties: 4931 N. Williams; 4937 N. Williams; 4939 N. Williams; 4947 N. Williams; 20 N. Alberta; 106 N. Alberta; 114 N. Alberta (Jointly these properties equal approximately 1 acre).

Date: 5/10/16

Re: PSC Mixed Use Zones Testimony. Document requesting Zone designation be revised to CM2 on properties owned by the mentioned parties.

Dear committee members:

We the Strong brothers have been engaged in conversations with various members of PSC for several months. During the course of those conversations and related meetings we came to believe our property had a good chance to be zoned as CM2. However in the recent draft of the comprehensive plan it appears that you have proposed a CM1 designation, to our surprise and disappointment.

The purpose of this document is multiple, first it is to ask the Planning and Sustainability Commission to consider zoning our property to (CM2) versus the proposed zoning of (CM1) as outlined in your tentative plan.

The second purpose is to present our reasons why we are requesting this zone change to happen and to have those reasons documented with your office. The following bullet points details the reasons we are making this request:

- A review of your proposed draft summary reveals that the intent of the plan is to create zones of activity so that persons have the ability to walk or bike to get the things they need. Our properties have the unique position of being in the middle of the activity happening all around us. It is our belief that our property could be the center jewel in the middle of this activity.
- Our property is situated a mere 2 to 3 tenths of a mile from (Killingsworth) to the North, (Skidmore) to the South, (MLK) to the East and (Albina) to the West all short walking distances. There are also regular bus schedules and bike lanes that make our property easily accessible to community members. The high level of activity happening all around us reflects that we are not in a low density area and high density mixed use developments are going up within close proximity to our property regularly. Our properties are directly on the high traffic streets of Williams Avenue and Alberta Street (see color coded attachment that shows surrounding zones as proposed).

- According to your description of the proposed CM2 zone our property fits nicely. You state “This medium-scale commercial mixed-use zone is intended for sites in a variety of centers and corridors, and in smaller mixed-use areas that are well served by frequent transit or within a larger area zoned for multi-dwelling development”. As mentioned previously we are in the middle of and a short walk away from larger zoned areas zoned for large scaled multi-dwelling development. You additionally say “Development is intended to be pedestrian-oriented and complement the scale of surrounding residentially zoned areas”. If our property is zoned as CM2 we would match the zones bordering us in all directions and be in synch with the intent of the plan.
- I mentioned previously that the Strong family is one of the few African American families in N/NE Portland who has been able to ward off gentrification, a phenomena that has been documented in Portland and caused numerous African Americans to loose properties and be displaced from N/NE Portland.

We mention this issue because we have attempted to engineer several projects on our site and each time we have been stymied by the fact that the numbers would not work as the property is currently zoned. The proposed zone (CM1) would not allow a project to pencil out either.

The course of our past efforts has connected us with several groups who are optimistic about a possible project on this jewel of a site but all proclaim that the zoning is a hindrance, due to its limitations.

Our efforts have included consultation with the Portland Development Commission and their DOS program, a yearlong negotiation with Portland Community Reinvestment a non-profit affordable housing program and finally the Portland Housing Bureau who is excited about the possibility of a project if the zoning is CM2.

Additionally we have reached out to Commissioner Dan Saltzman’s office and have been in regular contact with Nan Stark from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. Nan has supported our efforts and ideas and has been a stable sounding board for our planning.

In a nut shell all parties we attempted to do a project with were excited about the possibility. They all concurred that a project that brought property owners of color together, with Non-profit housing programs that offered affordable housing, and private developers could be a development model duplicated elsewhere nationally to address gentrification and urban displacement.

- I have been in contact with several neighbors close to our properties and they are in agreement that a CM2 zone designation supports their vision of how this block should zoned.
- The Strong family, African American owners of the properties involved, have been long time neighborhood members dating back to 1956. The family is well known politically and is also known as being socially conscientious as represented by Luther Strong and Opal Strong, who is now 100 years of age. Both were community activists and mentors to leaders of color. Opal Strong was appointed by the late Governor Vic Atiyeh and served as a board member for the council of senior citizens, a state wide effort. She was also a founding member and active participant leading the Humboldt/King neighborhood associations dating back to model cities, which is now the N/Ne coalition of neighborhoods.

Their social work skills were passed on to their children and grandchildren who are also passionate about serving the community of Portland. The off springs have shown that same drive to help others and illustrate such by having positions of importance in the African American community and the community at large. For example her two sons who own these properties are concerned about how to address the issues of gentrification, affordable housing and job creation in N/NE Portland. Another one of her grandchildren is the Pastor of one of the largest predominantly African American churches in Portland, while yet another grandchild is a top administrator at the United Way.

I believe that as long time residents of this neighborhood and as long time owners of these properties since 1976, we are uniquely positioned to give credible and sound input about future zoning in the community where we still live and care deeply about.

In conclusion I want to reiterate that it is the Strong brother's intent to pursue development opportunities for our properties. Additionally we are excited about the possibility of teaming with the City of Portland, the offices of the Commissioners, Private developers, Nonprofit housing programs like the Portland Housing Bureau and the African American community to quell the issue of gentrification and affordable housing.

Thank you for your time to receive and review our input about changing the proposed zone to CM2.

The Strong brothers
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